**“The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility”. Evaluate this claim.**

Knowledge is everywhere and can be obtained in many different ways. As a result of this every human being on the planet has knowledge of something. This knowledge could be completely unimportant to one person, and yet could also be the difference between life and death for another. “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility”, is an interesting claim and both sides can be argued for. In general I believe that knowledge does carry an ethical responsibility, because once somebody is in possession of a piece of knowledge then it is up to them what they are going to do with it. It all depends on what the knowledge is, the situation they are in, who they are imparting or withholding knowledge from and how this will affect people. However in order to evaluate this claim impartially, some knowledge issues must be looked at.

The knowledge issues that I have identified are; how can you possess knowledge? How is the knowledge you have affected by your ethics? And how can one know when they are ethically responsible? By thinking about these knowledge issues it can allow us evaluate the claim properly. Possession of knowledge happens when you have obtained knowledge. Even if that knowledge is deemed unimportant or irrelevant to you, you are still in possession of it and therefore have a responsibility for it. I believe that for the second knowledge issue it can be said that yes knowledge is affected by your ethics. If two people are in possession of the same knowledge then one person may choose to use that knowledge differently to the other, because their ethics will dictate what they want to do with it. Knowing when you are ethically responsible completely relies on the situation at hand. You are responsible for the knowledge itself but unless the possession of that knowledge affects something or someone profoundly then you may not be ethically responsible for that knowledge. To further understand these knowledge issues and by extension that claim we have to look at ethics as an area of knowledge.

Ethics as an area of knowledge can be related to the claim by taking the example of Albert Einstein’s unparalleled knowledge of nuclear physics. He was in possession of the knowledge and could have kept it to himself, preventing tragedies such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Cold War could also arguably have been prevented if he had kept the information to himself. His ethics should have told him that by imparting this knowledge to the world a weapon of mass destruction would invariably be created and used. However, looking at it from Einstein’s point of view it can be argued that as a scientist he is ethically bound to impart any knowledge which may have an effect on the scientific community. By looking at this example it can be seen that ethics as an area of knowledge has a very broad spectrum and can be used to justify both sides of an argument. As stated above, if two people have different ethics they will use the knowledge they have in different ways and still be able to justify their actions by stating that they were just following their ethical responsibility. I believe that this example helps highlight the fact that although people will be using ethics as an area of knowledge in different ways, it is still always related to how they use the knowledge in their possession.

Another example concerning ethics which may help understand the claim that possession of knowledge carries ethical responsibility is the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Ben Johnson won the 100m gold medal before testing positive for having a type of steroids in his system. Ethically, this went against everything an athlete stands for as using performance enhancing drugs is simply cheating. However at that time, ‘everyone was using them’ so was it ethically ok? Another ethical problem arising from this example is that Ben Johnson is on record as stating that he didn’t know what drugs he was taking or what they would do, he was just accepting what his doctor gave him. Now his doctor – George Astaphan – knew exactly what drugs were being used, knew how long they would take to get out of his system and also knew the risks involved. As a result of Astaphan’s knowledge of the drugs and what they were doing was he ethically responsible to not give Johnson the drugs because it was cheating? Or was he ethically responsible to give him the drugs because he was a doctor and Johnson was his client so he was obliged to help him? Once again it can be seen that even when you look at from both sides of the coin George Astaphan is still ethically responsible for the knowledge he has in his possession and how he was intending to use it.

20 years after the Seoul Olympics there was a financial crisis in the world. Banks were losing people’s money as a result of using them for other things and then not being able to recuperate it afterwards. This created a major problem in the world with many banks going bankrupt and having to close their branches across the world. This example connects with the claim as banks are ethically responsible to take care of all money put into their care, as this is exactly what clients are expecting to happen when they use that bank. When the banks started to lose the money should they have not told their clients straight away rather than waiting until there was nothing left at all? It can definitely be argued that the banks acted selfishly and were ethically wrong to keep this information from the general public. It could also be argued however that releasing this information to the public could have generated a world wide depression as people would have panicked and taken all of their money out of the banks and found other ways of keeping it themselves. This would not only have led to many economies collapsing but crime levels would have risen worldwide as people would now know that many people would have their life savings hidden in their house, rather than having it in a bank. By looking at it this way it can also be claimed that the banks were ethically correct to not disclose the knowledge that they had of the situation. Once again this example helps explain the fact that no matter which way you look at the possession of knowledge someone will always be ethically responsible for that knowledge.

By looking at these examples and using them to evaluate the claim that ‘the possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility’ it can be said that yes, possession of knowledge does carry an ethically responsibility. I believe this is the case because in every example I have given, every way you look at a situation you are able to justify the actions by looking at the ethics involved and applying them correctly to the situation. Even though some of the justifications are obviously arguing against what would be right in most people’s eyes you can see how in some points of view, their ethics would justify the decisions that they made. For this reason I believe that the claim is correct and that possession of all knowledge does carry an ethical responsibility.